

Person County Natural Areas Inventory

HYCO/GHENT HARDWOOD FOREST

Site Number: 2

Size: 147 acres

Site Significance: Regional

Quadrangle: Cluster Springs

Ownership: Progress Energy Carolinas, Inc.,
other private

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: This natural area has one of the richest and highest quality Piedmont/Mountain Levee Forests in the Piedmont. The site contains many natural communities: Piedmont/Mountain Levee Forest, Piedmont/Mountain Bottomland Forest, Piedmont/Mountain Semipermanent Impoundment, Piedmont/Coastal Plain Heath Bluff, Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest, Basic Mesic Forest, and Floodplain Pool. Two Significantly Rare plants – eastern isopyrum (*Enemion biternatum*) and Godfrey's thoroughwort (*Eupatorium godfreyanum*) – and five Watch List plant species are present. The site has high wildlife value; plus, a heronry and the Significantly Rare northern gray treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*) are also present.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The Storys Creek/Marlowe Creek Swamp natural area lies only 0.3 mile to the east, across a ridge and railroad track embankment. About 1.75 miles down the Hyco River, to the east, is the Hyco/Castle Floodplain Forest natural area. Also about 1.75 miles away, to the southwest, is the McGhees Mill Road Rare Plant Site.

SITE DESCRIPTION: The Hyco River is the major brownwater river flowing through Person County. The floodplain contains the richest alluvial soils in the county, despite the fact that two reservoirs – After Bay and Hyco – above this site capture much of the rich sediment that is brought into the river after rainfall events. Nonetheless, the soils in the floodplain are extremely rich, perhaps underlain by mafic rock (as the upland soils are of the Wilkes soil series).

Along the river on the east side, just below the After Bay Reservoir dam, is a bluff covered in a dense stand of mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), which forms a Piedmont/Coastal Plain Heath Bluff natural community. The upper half of the bluff contains a large population of the locally scarce barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*). Other plants on the bluff include little heartleaf (*Hexastylis minor*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), Virginia saxifrage (*Saxifraga virginensis*), asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.), rattlesnake-weed (*Hieracium venosum*), and liverleaf (*Hepatica americana*).

Adjacent to the river elsewhere is a slightly raised natural levee, where one of the best examples of Piedmont/Mountain Levee Forest in the Piedmont province is present. The canopy in the floodplain contains Florida maple (*Acer barbatum*), bitternut hickory (*Carya cordiformis*), shagbark hickory (*C. ovata*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), and sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*), among others. In the small tree/shrub layers, tall pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is very abundant, as is bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*) and some spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*). Several Watch List species occur on the levee. Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*) is common, possibly the largest population in the state; a few